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GOVT 100.02: Globalization in the Twenty-First Century

Instructor: Stephen Nelson

In-class writing exercise 2

September 6, 2006

Rationale

I designed this in-class writing exercise to accomplish two goals:

- (1) I wanted to encourage students to find and use *evidence* to support their claims – I intended to use this a jumping-off point for a discussion of what constitutes evidence and how we judge different types of evidence;
- (2) I wanted students to learn to *revise* their arguments in light of conflicting evidence – prompted by James Slevin’s observation in “A Letter to Maggie” that new undergraduates tend to regard conflicting evidence as an opportunity to engage different arguments than an obstacle.

I assigned two relatively short but data-heavy articles for the class.¹ The articles compared and contrasted different eras of economic globalization (1870 – 1914 and 1970 – 2000).

The Exercise

When the students entered the classroom, they were given a sheet of paper with the following text:

“There’s nothing fundamentally new about the extent of economic globalization the world has experienced in the last three decades.”

Do you agree or disagree with the statement above? Why?

I asked the students to write, without using any sources, for 6 minutes on whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement above. I purposefully included some trigger words (“fundamentally” and “extent”) to make the statement vague enough that it would elicit a variety of responses. I then broke the class into groups of three; the groups were asked to discuss their initial thoughts. I went between groups gathering information about their responses. I then asked the students to bring the two assigned readings out and to re-write their initial theses (“I agree” or “I disagree with the statement because...”), using evidence from the readings to support their claims. This was more difficult for many of the students than they expected; it proved to be a good place for a discussion of closer reading of texts, particularly social science texts that are laden with charts and tables. I then asked for students who agreed and disagreed to give evidence in support of their positions. Luckily, about half the class agreed and half disagreed.

¹ Michael Bordo, “Globalization in Historical Perspective,” *Business Economics* (January 2002): pp. 20 – 28; Jeffrey Frankel, “Globalization of the International Economy,” in Art and Jervis, eds. *International Politics: Enduring Concepts and Contemporary Issues* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2005): pp. 325-40.

I then went to the blackboard and asked how we might revise the initial thesis (“There’s nothing fundamentally new about the extent of economic globalization the world has experienced in the last three decades”) in light of the conflicting pieces of evidence. Two students suggested that we needed to make the thesis more nuanced to encompass both sets of evidence. The class then helped me craft the following thesis:

“Economic globalization is not unique to the current era, but the *extent* of economic globalization since 1970s is unprecedented.” Through the exercise, I was able to show the students how to revise a thesis to accommodate different types of evidence. Several noted that this was a different approach than the “get thesis, find evidence to support thesis, ignore everything else” style of research they practiced in secondary school. We concluded by walking through how one might organize a paper around the new thesis we created. The entire exercise took around 50 minutes.